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July 29, 2020

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney  
Chairman  
House Finance Committee  
State House  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 7171 – An Act Relating to Making Appropriations in Support of FY2021 - Governor's Budget Amendment - Article 5 (Capitol Development Program)

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing in support of H 7171 – An Act Relating to Making Appropriations in Support of FY2021 - Governor's Budget Amendment - Article 5 (Capitol Development Program). The proposed amendment includes the design and construction of new laboratories and ancillary facilities to provide enhanced public health services, pursue medical innovations, and develop bioscience-related economy at a cost totaling \$107 million.

The proposed amendment represents a strategic, responsible approach that directly addresses the public health crisis the state is currently facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while, simultaneously, looks toward our state's future. It is more critical than ever that the Rhode Island Department of Health's (RIDOH) laboratories can provide enhanced testing services for disease prevention and management; food, water, and environmental monitoring; and medicolegal investigations. If we have learned anything from the current crisis, it is that we need to be prepared for the next pandemic.

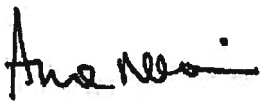
It is entirely possible that we could experience another pandemic in the next several years. It would be irresponsible for Rhode Island to be unprepared to meet the demands of the next emerging pandemic. RIDOH's State Health Laboratories have been critically important during the crisis. For example, the laboratories have ensured rapid turnaround times for COVID-19 testing. RIDOH's State Health Laboratories are also the primary responder to testing needs for all public health emergencies including, but not limited to, H1N1, Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), Ebola, Zika, and opioid overdose.

RIDOH's current laboratories facility was built decades ago, and unfortunately, the facility was not designed to meet today's public health laboratory needs and now suffers from an aging infrastructure. The State of Rhode Island and its residents deserve modern, high-quality, state-of-the-art laboratories that can respond to public health emergencies *and* can also be a hub of science and innovation in our state.

The amendment, if enacted, would allow Rhode Island to perform other types of testing, conduct research, launch public-private partnerships, and attract medical science and biotechnology companies to create new, high-paying jobs in the state. The new laboratories would also be poised to meet the needs of our hospitals and healthcare systems in new and innovative ways. Lastly, it is important to note that Rhode Island's General Treasurer has made it clear that Rhode Island can, at this time, afford to borrow up to \$600 million.

It is for these reasons that I strongly encourage your favorable consideration of the Governor's Budget Amendment - Article 5.

Sincerely,



for

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH  
Director  
Rhode Island Department of Health

CC:           The Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee  
          Danica Iacoi, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker



## Leading in Biotech RIDOH State Health Laboratories

A vision for Rhode Island's Center of Excellence for Laboratory Sciences  
Protecting public health and promoting economic growth

*The State needs a new Laboratory building to continue rapid response to increasingly complex threats to public health, like the current COVID-19 pandemic, and to keep pace with emerging scientific technologies. A new facility, Rhode Island's Center of Excellence for Laboratory Sciences, would allow Rhode Island to deliver state-of-the-art public health testing services. Funding to build a new State Health Laboratory on state-controlled land is included in a bond proposal which, if approved by the General Assembly, will be on the November statewide ballot.*

### Vital Testing Services Provided by State Health Laboratories

- Investigate life-threatening outbreaks of infectious diseases, like COVID-19
- Ensure safety of drinking water, food, air quality, and coastal waters
- Lead screening for Rhode Island's children
- DNA testing and illegal drug identification for law enforcement
- Forensic and clinical toxicology to help fight opioid overdose crisis
- State's link to specialized CDC Laboratories



### Current Limitations at the Chapin Building

- Inadequate utilities
  - HVAC systems and equipment have reached or exceeded useful life
  - Inadequate electrical supply damages expensive lab equipment and limits additional, new testing equipment
- Structural deficiencies
  - High level of deferred maintenance
  - Potential for staff/visitor injuries
- Risk for contamination
  - High risk for cross contamination between labs
  - Potential exposure to infectious agents
  - Inadequate exhaust may expose staff to toxic chemicals



### Benefits of a New Facility for State Health Laboratories

1. Improved public health services
  - ✓ Enhanced capacity to provide advanced microbiological and chemical testing and analysis
  - ✓ New bio-containment facility
  - ✓ Increased space for specimen handling and processing during pandemic
2. Fiscal efficiency and economic impact
  - ✓ Shared services and space with a commercial or academic partner
  - ✓ Built on State-owned or controlled land
  - ✓ Eliminate deferred maintenance/facility costs of Chapin Building
  - ✓ Attract additional federal funding
  - ✓ Support local economy: shellfish/seafood safety analysis
3. Reduced liability
  - ✓ Prevent potential harmful exposures or injury
  - ✓ Infrared temperature scanners installed for staff safety during pandemic
  - ✓ Separation of hands-on lab work and administrative work



## Current Critical Facility Deficiencies

